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Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development

Sub-theme: the role of volunteerism in the promotion of social development

Statement submitted by the American Association of Retired Persons, a non-governmental organization in general consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

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* E/CN.5/2001/1.

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The American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) appreciates the opportunity to intervene in the thirty-ninth session of the Commission for Social Development, coinciding with the 2001 International Year of Volunteers in support of a society for all ages. AARP is a non-governmental organization in general consultative status with the Economic and Social Council, with a membership of 33 million persons and over 72,000 volunteers.

We would like to call to the attention of the Commission for Social Development the contributions of older persons worldwide to volunteerism in the promotion of social development.

In celebration of the 2001 International Year of Volunteers, AARP, in collaboration with the United Nations Volunteers and with the Programme on Ageing of the United Nations Secretariat, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, launched a postcard campaign requesting the feedback of older persons worldwide on their contributions as volunteers.

The worldwide campaign consisted of over 540 responses from 51 countries and has confirmed the vital role that older persons play in their communities and families. The definition of "volunteerism" varies from person to person, nation to nation, but the idea of volunteering remains a common value bestowed upon persons of all ages and communities of all nations. We request that the results of the postcard campaign be included in the revised Plan of Action on Ageing as a contribution to the second World Assembly on Ageing.

Although many older persons worldwide are socially excluded from their communities, they continue to volunteer. In many cases, society expects older persons to disengage from social life activities as they age, but owing to the volunteer postcard campaign, it is apparent that older persons continue to volunteer even after social exclusion.

A recent report of the Secretary-General to the Commission for Social Development stated that older persons were increasingly recognized as contributors to society, rather than simply dependants, and as agents of change themselves. Volunteering is one of the many ways in which older persons contribute to society, acting as agents of change.

AARP requests that the Commission, in its deliberation on the sub-theme, recognize the importance and extent of the contributions of older persons to society and social development as volunteers. It also wishes to extend its assistance in any further research concerning older volunteers.

AARP would like to encourage further reference to the contributions of older persons to their communities, societies and their countries in the revised Plan of Action on Ageing which is to be presented at the second World Assembly on Ageing in 2002.